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The Role of Character Strengths in Adolescent Romantic Relationships: An Initial Study on Partner Selection and Mates' Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

The present study investigated the role of 24 character strengths in 87 adolescent romantic relationships focusing on their role in partner selection and their role in mates' life satisfaction. Measures included the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth, the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, and an Ideal Partner Profiler for the composition of an ideal partner. Honesty, humor, and love were the most preferred character strengths in an ideal partner. Hope, religiousness, honesty, and fairness showed the most substantial assortment coefficients. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed targets' character strengths as explaining variance in targets' life satisfaction. Furthermore, to a lesser degree, specific character strengths of partners and couples' similarity in certain character strengths explained variance in targets' life satisfaction beyond targets' character strengths. This first research on this topic showed that character strengths play a significant role in adolescent romantic relationships.

Keywords: character strengths; partner selection; adolescent romantic relationship; life satisfaction; mate preferences; assortative mating

The Role of Character Strengths in Adolescent Romantic Relationships: An Initial Study on Partner Selection and Mates' Life Satisfaction

Introduction

The present exploratory study investigated the role of character strengths for the description of ideal partners, for selecting real life partners, and for determining mates' global life satisfaction. Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed the Values in Action (VIA) classification of 24 morally valued, positive traits (i.e., character strengths) that are represented in individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Their theoretically derived VIA classification consists of six virtues (on the highest, abstract level) that are manifest in life via character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Each of these virtues comprises three to five observable, measurable character strengths: (1) *wisdom and knowledge* (includes the character strengths of creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective), (2) *courage* (i.e., bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest), (3) *humanity* (i.e., love, kindness, social intelligence), (4) *justice* (i.e., teamwork, fairness, leadership), (5) *temperance* (i.e., forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation), and (6) *transcendence* (i.e., beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness). Peterson and Seligman (2004) established several criteria that a positive trait had to fulfill to be included in their classification. One criterion was that the display of a character strength by an individual does not diminish other persons in their environment, quite the contrary, their display elevates others who are with them (Park & Peterson, 2009). This led us to the assumption that character strengths are worthy to be studied in the context of romantic relationships, where two mates interact closely with each other. It was thus expected that character strengths are relevant for partner selection and mates' life satisfaction.

We considered Peterson's (2006) two-dimensional model differentiating character strengths with *focus on the self* (e.g., creativity, curiosity) vs. character strengths with *focus on others* (e.g., teamwork, fairness), and *mind-related* (e.g., open-mindedness, self-regulation) vs. *heart-related* character strengths (e.g., gratitude, love) reflecting whether all character strengths might be equally important for adolescent romance. Given the lack of theory and research in this area of inquiry, our study was exploratory in nature. Nevertheless, we expected that most character strengths would be significantly related to adolescent romance (e.g., for partner selection), especially those character strengths with a focus on others and those that are heart-related, because there seems to be a clear connection to romance. On the other hand, character strengths that represent the combination of self-focused and mind-related characteristics (i.e., four of the five character strengths of the virtue wisdom and knowledge) were expected to be less strongly related to adolescent romance, including describing an ideal partner and becoming a couple.

One study investigated the topic of character strengths in the context of romance (Steen, 2003). Conducting content analyses of *personal advertisements* of 222 adults (age ranging from 25-72 years) Steen identified age, love, ethnicity, physical attractiveness, humor, education, zest, and kindness as the most desired (between 44% and 24%) characteristics. This finding indicates that specific character strengths (e.g., love, humor, zest, kindness) appeared more than others in adults' expectations for desired partners. Furthermore, Steen asked 1367 participants (age ranging from 16-65 years) to rate the importance of various personality characteristics in a partner, which make a *good* romance (e.g., intelligence, dependability, 24 character strengths). Concerning the character strengths, Steen found that loyalty (teamwork), capacity to love and be loved (love), and honesty were rated as the most important characteristics,

even more important than, for example, intelligence. The current study extends beyond Steen's (2003) research by studying character strengths for the first time in adolescent couples (vs. individuals) using a sophisticated measure of character strengths.

Partner selection

We pursued two approaches when studying criteria for adolescents' selection of partners (i.e., consensual preferences and assortative preferences; e.g., Figueredo, Sefcek, & Jones, 2006). *Consensual preferences* (i.e., ratings of the desirability of listed personality characteristics in an ideal partner) have been extensively studied in adults. Prior research found personality characteristics, like mutual attraction/love, dependable character, kind and understanding, character, maturity, exciting personality, good overall personality, honesty, good sense of humor among the most preferred characteristics, whereas religiousness or similar religious background were found among the less preferred characteristics (e.g., Buss & Barnes, 1986; Buss et al., 1990; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001; Feingold, 1992; Furnham, 2009; Regan, 2008). There are only a few studies that investigated consensual mate preferences in adolescents. Regan and Joshi (2003) found intellect (e.g., intelligent, sense of humor), physical appeal (e.g., physically attractive appearance), sexual drive (e.g., sexual passionate), and interpersonal skills and responsiveness (e.g., friendly) as most preferred characteristics. Honesty was found as the most preferred characteristic in a partner among Swiss adolescents (Bodenmann, 2003).

Assortative preferences (i.e., correlation between males' characteristic A and females' characteristic A) studied in adults showed different degrees of positive assortment depending on the category of personality variables. Intelligence, opinions, and attitudes yielded the highest positive assortment coefficients (.50 - .54; Vandenberg, 1972). This was found, for example, for religious attitudes (Watson, Klohnen, Casillas,

Simms, Haig, & Berry, 2004). Personality traits (e.g., big five, sensation seeking) have shown positive, but smaller coefficients (between zero and .35; e.g., Lesnik-Oberstein & Cohen, 1984; McCrae, Martin, Hřebíčková, Urbanek, Boomsma, Willemsen, & Costa, 2008; Vandenberg, 1972). Simon, Aikins, and Prinstein (2008) studied in a longitudinal design prerelationship similarity of adolescents that became a couple during the study. They found positive associations between mates' popularity, body appeal, self-rated depressive symptoms, and physical attractiveness indicating positive assortment (coefficients between .25 and .56). Because character strengths were found as predictive for popularity and psychopathological symptoms in adolescents (Park & Peterson, 2006), it was assumed for this study that those positive, valued traits might also show positive assortment coefficients. The degree of assortment was expected to be similar to that found for other traits. Based on the reported literature it is hypothesized that at least the character strengths of humor, honesty, kindness, love, religiousness, and teamwork will play a role in adolescent partner selection.

Mates' life satisfaction

Another criterion to be included in the VIA classification was that character strengths should contribute to a fulfilled and satisfied life (e.g., Peterson & Park, 2011; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hence, we hypothesized that character strengths would predict individuals' and partners' life satisfaction. Therefore, we explored the role of character strengths in adolescent romantic relationships as *positive institutions* (i.e., couples, where both partners report a satisfied life). Life satisfaction is defined as the cognitive, judgmental component of subjective well-being that asks for a global evaluation of life (e.g., Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Huebner, 1991a). For the purposes of this study, high self-reported satisfaction with life was considered a

good indicator of a life where most life conditions (incl. the romantic relationship) are going well.

Similarity in different characteristics (e.g., values, personality traits) has been already used as predictor of satisfaction in adults. Arrindell and Luteijn (2000) found negative correlations between dissimilarity (operationalized with the Euclidean distance) in personality and satisfaction of -.20 and -.24 for males and females, respectively, indicating that the more dissimilar couples reported lower satisfaction. Watson et al. (2004) examined by means of hierarchical multiple regressions, whether the difference score (i.e., absolute difference between partners' ratings in a variable of interest) in a domain (e.g., Neuroticism) predicted satisfaction in males or females when controlling for the targets' and partners' scores in that domain. They found an incremental effect on wives' satisfaction for similarity in positive emotions and dissimilarity in negative emotions with significant R^2 changes of .016 and .021, respectively. Husbands' satisfaction was influenced (beyond self and wives' ratings) by similarity in Openness and Conscientiousness, and dissimilarity in negative emotions (significant R^2 changes of .019, .016, and .014, respectively).

With respect to character strengths, we hypothesized that the strongest impact on mates' life satisfaction would be due to the targets' own character strengths, because those character strengths have been found to be substantial predictors of individuals' life satisfaction in several self-report studies (e.g., Park & Peterson, 2006; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007; Ruch, Proyer, Harzer, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2010; Ruch, Weber, Park, & Peterson, 2011; Van Eeden, Wissing, Dreyer, Park, & Peterson, 2008). There are no specific hypotheses about how partners' character strengths would be related to targets' life satisfaction. However, Watson et al. (2004) reported that partners' personality

characteristics like Neuroticism and Agreeableness contributed slightly to targets' life satisfaction. Furthermore, prior research has found only small effects of similarity in personality characteristics predicting satisfaction. Thus, we also assumed small effects on targets' satisfaction for couples' similarity in character strengths.

The present study

This study is aimed at helping to close gaps in literature. For example, Collins, Welsh, and Furman (2009, p. 638) noted that "little is known, however, about adolescents' selection of partners". Three major gaps were identified in the current literature. First, most available research on partner selection is based on adult samples, but according to Brown, Feiring, and Furman (1999), romance is not only broadly represented in many songs or television serials, but it is also highly represented in adolescents' minds, which means, it is important for their lives. Furthermore, romantic relationships contribute to shaping the subsequent general developmental course (e.g., identity development; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Therefore, there is a need to study the determinants of young people's romantic relationships, including the possible role of character strengths. Second, the conceptual breadth of investigated variables often has been too variable (e.g., rating lists combining broad, more abstract with narrow, more specific concepts). Hence, the present study will investigate a family of 24 different character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) in context of adolescent romance to understand their role in more detail, at the same level of abstraction. Third, there is currently no knowledge whether both partners' character strengths or couple similarity in character strengths provide incremental information on mates' life satisfaction beyond the individuals' own character strengths.

Therefore, the present study is aimed at answering three main questions: First, which of the 24 character strengths are consensually preferred mostly in an ideal

partner? Second, are there assortative preferences for character strengths in adolescent romantic relationships? Third, what amount of variance in mates' life satisfaction will be explained by (a) targets' character strengths, (b) by partner's character strengths beyond the targets' character strengths, and (c) by couples' similarity in character strengths beyond both targets' and partners' character strengths? Additionally, as honesty has been found to be very relevant for romantic relationships (Bodenmann, 2003; Steen, 2003) there will be a special focus on its role in this context in the present study.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 174 German-speaking Swiss participating in a total of 87 heterosexual romantic relationships. Their mean age was 16.45 years (*SD* = 1.28; ranging from 13-19 years). About two thirds of them (63.6%) attended secondary school (highest level), 22.0% attended an apprenticeship, 6.9% attended secondary school (medium level), 7.5% reported other education. The averaged relationship duration was 11.19 months (*SD* = 9.14; min = 0.25, max = 36.00 months).

Instruments

The *Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth* (*VIA-Youth*; Park, & Peterson, 2006) adapted to German by Ruch et al. (2011) consists of 198 items for the self-assessment of the 24 character strengths of the VIA classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There are 7-9 items per character strength, and about one third of the items are reverse coded. The VIA-Youth uses a 5-point Likert-style format (from 1 = *not like me at all* to 5 = *very much like me*). A sample item is "I believe that things will always work out no matter how difficult they seem now" (hope). The VIA-Youth is tested in several studies as a reliable and valid measurement (e.g., Park & Peterson,

2006; Ruch, et al., 2011). The internal consistencies of the 24 scales ranged from α = .66 (perspective and social intelligence) to α = .91 (religiousness) yielding a median of α = .77 in this study (only two scales yielded coefficients < .70).

The *Students' Life Satisfaction Scale* (*SLSS*; Huebner, 1991a) adapted to German by Weber, Ruch, and Huebner (in press) is a seven-item self-report measure of satisfaction with life (as a global cognitive judgment of adolescents' life). Two of the items are reverse coded. It uses a 6-point answer format (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). A sample item is "I have what I want in life". The SLSS is tested in several studies across cultures as a reliable and valid measurement (e.g., Huebner, 1991a, b; Weber et al., in press). The internal consistency yielded an alpha coefficient of .89 in this study.

The *Ideal Partner Profiler* (*IPP*; Weber, 2008) is a list of the 24 character strengths presented as one-word descriptions with 0-2 synonyms (e.g., "gratitude" or "honesty/authenticity" or "open-mindedness/judgment/critical thinking") as proxies for the character strengths. Respondents were asked to select exactly five character strengths to describe an ideal partner. Furthermore, the respondents were told that these selections should be done, without taking into account the character strengths of their current partners.

Procedure

Participants were recruited in German-speaking Swiss schools within the classroom setting. In a 10 minute time slot, the adolescents were introduced to the general procedure of the study (e.g., how to fill in the questionnaires). If participants were currently in a romantic relationship, they received an envelope containing two separated test-booklets composed of the German VIA-Youth, the IPP, the German SLSS, and questions regarding demographics (e.g., age, gender). Couples were

instructed to fill in the questionnaires at home in a silent setting separated from each other to avoid biased answers. Upon request, participants received written individualized feedback on their character strengths. All adolescents participated voluntarily, and participants younger than 18 years provided the permission of their parents or legal guardians. None of the participants were paid for their services.

Results

Consensual preferences for character strengths

To describe consensual preferences of character strengths, the selected ideal partner character strengths (i.e., IPP nominations) were ranked according to absolute frequencies of their nomination. Table 1 shows the results split by gender.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 shows that honesty, humor, love, kindness, hope, gratitude, and fairness were among the most frequently nominated character strengths in both males and females. Religiousness, love of learning, perseverance, and leadership were among the less frequent nominated ones. As expected, honesty, humor, kindness were among the most preferred character strengths. Furthermore, as expected, this study expanded the list of consensually preferred characteristics in mates by several further positive traits (e.g., hope, gratitude, fairness). Spearman's rank correlation between males' and females' rankings of character strengths was computed and indicated a convergence of .89 ($p < .001$), suggesting a high consensus in preferred character strengths among male and female adolescents.

How did adolescents choose the character strengths for an ideal partner?

To examine whether adolescents described an ideal partner similar to themselves or if they considered the current partner as a model, we conducted ipsativized analyses.

Therefore, the individual ranks of self-reported character strengths were computed and the top five (i.e., signature strengths) were coded with 1 whereas the remaining 19 were coded with 0. The five selected character strengths of the IPP were also coded with 1 and the remaining ones with 0. The Phi correlation coefficients were computed between character strengths and self-reported ideal partner nominations for each participant. The means of the Phi coefficients were .21 and .24 for males and females, respectively, which suggest small convergence between the own and the selected ideal signature strengths. Furthermore, the self-reported character strengths were cross-correlated with individuals' partner-rated ideal partner nominations to test whether the current partner was the model for the ideal partner ratings. The means of the correlation coefficients were $r = .18$ for both males and females, suggesting small effects as well.

The role of adolescents' life satisfaction when describing an ideal partner. Pearson correlations between the ipsatively generated correlation coefficients (Phi coefficients; as described above) and life satisfaction scores of males and females were computed. Results showed that the more satisfied adolescents tended to use themselves as a model when composing an ideal partner ($r = .35$, $p = .002$ for males; $r = .21$, $p = .066$ for females).

Assortative preferences for character strengths

We computed correlations between males and females for the 24 character strengths as indicators of assortative preferences (e.g., Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) in five different steps. In a first step, zero-order correlations were calculated. Second, we computed a first set of partial correlations (controlling for a possible effect of duration of the relationship). Third, as we found associations between mates' age ($r = .40$, $p < .001$) as well as mates' life satisfaction scores ($r = .26$, $p = .015$), we computed a second set of partial correlations (controlling for mates' age). Fourth, a third set of

partial correlations (controlling for mates' life satisfaction) was computed. In the fifth final step, a fourth set of partial correlations was computed (controlling for duration of the relationship, and for mates' age and mates' life satisfaction; see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows that nine character strengths showed statistically significant associations at the zero-order level indicating assortative mating (all positive). Honesty, hope, religiousness, and fairness showed the most substantial coefficients with *r*s > .35. All 24 coefficients varied between -.10 (open-mindedness) and .46 (hope) with a median of .19, which was in the expected range.

Three out of four character strengths of the virtue courage were found as correlated (i.e., honesty, bravery, and zest). Furthermore, four out of five character strengths of the virtue transcendence were found as correlated (i.e., hope, religiousness, beauty, and gratitude). Only one character strength of the virtue wisdom and knowledge (i.e., creativity), and one character strength of justice (i.e., fairness) showed positive assortment. No assortment was found for the character strengths of humanity and temperance indicating that character strengths of these virtues were not relevant in adolescent partner selection.

The partial correlation analyses showed no substantial change in coefficients, when controlling for duration of the relationship as well as for males' and females' age. However, when controlling for males' and females' life satisfaction, the assortment coefficients of zest and hope showed a substantial decrease (see Table 2), but hope still stayed significant. We also found this effect, when controlling for all above-mentioned control variables. This indicated that the zero-order assortment coefficient of zest in

adolescent romantic relationships was mostly due to mates' life satisfaction, while assortment in hope was not completely explainable by mates' life satisfaction.

Combining results from ideal-partner ratings and assortment analyses – the case of honesty

More than 82.0% of the adolescents indicated honesty as being among the five signature strengths of an ideal partner. Furthermore, honesty was found as a character strength with high positive assortment. Splitting the honesty scores at the median (i.e., < median = low honesty; > median = high honesty) identified more couples, where both partners were high in honesty (38.5%) than couples where both partners were low in honesty (28.2%). Mixed couples (i.e., one partner high and one partner low in honesty; 33.3%) were numerically the second most frequent (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 shows further on that 19 out of 22 (86.4%) of the couples where both partners were low in honesty asked for an honest ideal partner, whereas around 70.0% of the mixed couples and couples where both were high in honesty asked for an honest ideal partner. This result indicates that honesty is in general a desired character strength, but numerically mostly desired of mates in couples where both partners were low in honesty. Examining whether honesty mattered related to mates' life satisfaction, a 3 (type of couple) x 2 (males' and female' life satisfaction) ANOVA was computed with life satisfaction as a repeated measures variable (see Figure 2 for the results).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 shows that couples where both partners were high in honesty showed a significantly higher (indicated by LSD post hoc tests) averaged life satisfaction

(M = 5.01) compared to the mixed couples (M = 4.63), and couples where both partners were low in honesty (M = 4.58; F[2, 84] = 3.98, p = .022). This result suggested that life satisfaction was a function of the represented degree of couples' honesty. The highest life satisfaction was reported in couples where both partners showed high honesty. One honest partner could not compensate for the decrease of life satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Prediction of mates' life satisfaction

In the following, we examined the contribution of both targets' and partners' character strengths, and couples' similarity in character strengths on targets' life satisfaction (i.e., separated for males and females). Because Watson et al. (2004, p. 1035) argued that "difference scores confound linear and configural effects and fail to provide a clear, unambiguous assessment of similarity/dissimilarity", we computed hierarchical multiple regression analyses utilizing three steps to test the incremental amount of variance in the criterion variable explained by subsequent predictor variables, controlling for prior predictor variables. This strategy of analysis also considered the earlier reported associations between males and females in certain character strengths (i.e., assortative preferences).

Hence, 24 hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted twice, with one set of 24 predicting the males' satisfaction and one set of 24 predicting the females' satisfaction. In each of the regressions, targets' self-report was entered in step 1, partners' self-report was entered in step 2, and finally the difference score (i.e., the absolute value of the difference between the mates' scores on each of the 24 character strengths) as an indicator of similarity/dissimilarity was entered in step 3. Table 3 presents the R^2 changes and Rs for both males' and females' satisfaction.

Insert Tables 3 about here

Table 3 shows that in general, character strengths were found to be good predictors of life satisfaction in adolescents (see also Ruch et al., 2011). Targets' life satisfaction was primarily a function of the self-reported character strengths followed by specific partners' self-reported character strengths and similarity scores.

For both, males and females, ten character strengths showed final *R*s of .30 or higher predicting targets' life satisfaction. Hope, zest, gratitude, love, prudence, perseverance, honesty, self-regulation were identified as potent predictors in both genders. Humor and forgiveness were additionally found in males, whereas teamwork and religiousness were additionally found in females as predictors of life satisfaction. Most of the variance in targets' life satisfaction was explained by the targets' self-reports in step 1. It explained up to 40.4% of the variance in males' satisfaction and up to 43.0% of the variance in females' life satisfaction. Additionally, females' forgiveness as well as males' perseverance, social intelligence, and prudence were found to be predictors of the partners' life satisfaction in the second step indicating that specific partner characteristics also played a role for partners' life satisfaction. Finally, in step 3 significant effects were found for the absolute difference (couples' similarity), and those with inconsistent directions. Higher males' life satisfaction was related to similarity in perseverance and zest as well as to dissimilarity in forgiveness and humor. Higher female's life satisfaction was associated with similarity in honesty and teamwork.

Discussion

The present exploratory study was designed to explore the role of character strengths in both adolescent partner selection and mates' life satisfaction. Although previous studies have investigated consensual preferences for partner characteristics like *character* or a *good overall personality* (e.g., Feingold, 1992; Regan, 2008), the present

study shows the benefits of studying *character* within a multidimensional approach like the VIA classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Asking adolescents to describe an ideal partner, the present research found that honesty was the most desired character strength, followed by humor, love, kindness, and hope. The results of the current research thus suggest that the list of important character strengths in an ideal partner should be extended in the context of adolescent romantic relationships.

The present study also revealed interesting patterns in preferences and assortative mating, particularly with respect to three character strengths. First, as expected, the present study - again - found honesty as the most valued character strength in a romantic partner for both males and females (e.g., Bodenmann, 2003; Furnham, 2009; Steen, 2003), and honesty showed positive assortment. However, the findings demonstrated that a high degree of honesty is required on the part of both persons to call it a positive institution (i.e., a relationship, where both are satisfied). If both partners are low in honesty (i.e., a lack of honest and authentic behavior, feelings, and thoughts), it seems clear that this could result in a greater desire for honesty, which understandably can result in lower life satisfaction.

Humor was a highly preferred character strength in this study (see also, e.g., Bressler, Martin, & Balshine, 2006; Regan & Joshi, 2003), for both males and females. This finding is consistent with Buss (1988) who found *displaying a good sense of humor* as the most frequently nominated way to "be effective in successfully attracting a member of the opposite sex" (p. 621). Not surprisingly, humor does not show assortment in the present study, because males and females might have something different in mind when selecting humor as a desired strength in an ideal partner. Bressler et al. (2006) showed that males prefer females who are receptive to their (i.e., the males') expressions of humor whereas females prefer males who express humor.

The VIA-Youth dimension of humor represents the perspective of liking to laugh and joke, and bringing smiles to other people, thus, the VIA-Youth highlights the active expression of humor rather than the passive appreciation of humor. Furthermore, humor as a character strength recently has been found as significantly associated with the use of socially warm humor (i.e., using humor to promote good will; Müller & Ruch, 2011). The distinction between the meaning of humor in relation to target versus partner preference ratings might be a reason for the finding of no assortment among the adolescents in this study.

As in the present study, religiousness typically is found as ranked very low, when asking for mates' characteristics that are consensually preferred (e.g., Buss et al, 1990). However, as found for religious attitudes (e.g., Watson et al., 2004) religiousness as character strength also shows high positive assortment in the present study. It seems plausible that a religious individual (i.e., believing in a higher purpose and meaning in life) and a nonreligious individual (i.e., believing in earthly, concrete, and manifest aspects) do not fit together very well. A comparable degree in religiousness might be a substantial base for a long-lasting, fulfilling relationship.

The role of character strengths related to life satisfaction in couples is quite interesting. The targets' own character strengths are the best predictors of one's own life satisfaction, but specific partners' character strengths seem to be predictive beyond targets' character strengths as well. Like demonstrated in previous research (e.g., Watson et al., 2004) similarity in personality variables is mostly only a minor predictor in sense of magnitude of coefficients. The present study also found that similarity and dissimilarity in character strengths explain variance in global life satisfaction above and beyond targets' and partners' character strengths.

These initial findings need to be interpreted in the context of some limitations. First, the results need to be replicated in the investigated cultural environment for validation. Following this, it might be interesting to study this cross-culturally to see whether the same character strengths were desired in a partner (ideal or real) in different areas of the world. Second, the cross-sectional design of this study means that causality cannot be established. Thus, longitudinal designs are needed to derive causal inferences regarding the role of character strengths in adolescent romantic relationships. Such longer-term designs would facilitate understanding their antecedents (e.g., whether couples become more equal in selected characteristics over time), and consequences (e.g., stability of the relationships, mates' satisfaction, relationship quality). However, the short duration and instability of relationships in adolescence (e.g., Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009) might be a problematic point for sophisticated longitudinal research. Therefore, couples in late adolescence might be followed up for several years, which would facilitate the study of successful vs. unsuccessful relationships. Such results would give information on the specific aspects (e.g., specific configurations of mates' character strengths) of an adolescent romantic relationship that make it perceived as positive. Third, the current results are based exclusively on self-reports. Future research could also ask for peer-reported or parent-reported character strengths to determine whether self-reported data are comparable with views of significant others. Fourth, future studies might incorporate additional variables to explore a more comprehensive nomological network of variables that may serve as relevant criteria for partner selection, but also aspects that might be related to mates' life satisfaction. Variables such as mates' physical attractiveness, social status or mates' popularity at school, but also couples' intimacy, and mates' sexual experiences might be promising candidates for such an extended model. This opens the possibility for studies of interactions

between character strengths and such variables. For one example, it might be that individuals with prudence vs. curiosity as individual top strength differ in the degree of sexual experiences, which could in turn have consequences for the relationship quality.

To conclude, the present findings extend the literature on first knowledge on the role of character strengths in adolescent romantic relationships for both partner selection and mates' life satisfaction. Specific character strengths are useful to describe an ideal partner with honesty, humor, and love as the most favored ones. Certain character strengths (e.g., religiousness, honesty, fairness) showed positive assortment, suggesting that "birds of a feather flock together". There was no negative assortment for character strengths. The targets' own character strengths, and to a lesser degree partners' character strengths and the couples' fit in character strengths seem to play a role for mates' life satisfaction. The study points to the potential usefulness of knowledge about adolescents' character strengths that might be helpful for adolescents, their parents, as well as for youth counseling and in mental health promotion contexts.

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Figure captions

Figure 1. Distribution of self-reported (VIA-Youth) honesty ratings in romantic relationships combined with ideal partner ratings (IPP) in three different types of couples.

Figure 2. Couples' averaged life satisfaction (SLSS) scores (± *SE*) in three different types of couples.

Table 1

Males and Females IPP Nominations of Character Strengths

Males (n = 80)			Females (n = 85)		
Variables	f	%	Variables	f	%
Honesty	66	82.50	Honesty	73	85.88
Humor	62	77.50	Humor	65	76.47
Love	52	65.00	Love	51	60.00
Kindness	30	37.50	Kindness	41	48.24
Hope	22	27.50	Hope	26	30.59
Gratitude	19	23.75	Gratitude	20	23.53
Fairness	18	22.50	Fairness	19	22.35
Forgiveness	17	21.25	Creativity	18	21.18
Prudence	17	21.25	Social Intelligence	17	20.00
Creativity	14	17.50	Curiosity	16	18.82
Curiosity	14	17.50	Forgiveness	12	14.12
Open-mindedness	14	17.50	Bravery	11	12.94
Social Intelligence	13	16.25	Zest	10	11.76
Beauty	13	16.25	Beauty	8	9.41
Zest	6	7.50	Open-mindedness	7	8.24
Perspective	4	5.00	Teamwork	7	8.24
Teamwork	4	5.00	Self-regulation	7	8.24
Modesty	3	3.75	Prudence	6	7.06
Self-regulation	3	3.75	Perspective	3	3.53
Bravery	2	2.50	Perseverance	2	2.35
Leadership	2	2.50	Modesty	2	2.35
Love of learning	1	1.25	Love of learning	1	1.18

Perseverance	1	1.25	Leadership	1	1.18
Religiousness	1	1.25	Religiousness	0	0.00

Note. *f* = Frequency of nominations.

Table 2

Zero-Order Pearson Correlations, and Four Partial Correlation Analyses Between Males' and Females' Self-Reports Analyzing Assortative Preferences in Character Strengths in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Variables	Zero-order	Partial 1	Partial 2	Partial 3	Partial 4
Creativity	.23*	.22*	.30**	.23*	.30**
Curiosity	.11	.10	.07	.09	.07
Open-mindedness	-.10	-.09	-.10	-.10	-.08
Love of learning	.19	.14	.12	.15	.07
Perspective	.02	.01	.02	-.02	-.01
Bravery	.34**	.37**	.35**	.32**	.37***
Perseverance	.20	.20	.20	.12	.13
Honesty	.42***	.43***	.44***	.36**	.39***
Zest	.31**	.30**	.32**	.15	.17
Love	.19	.20	.20	.15	.21
Kindness	.17	.20	.18	.18	.20
Social Intelligence	.09	.10	.10	.07	.08
Teamwork	.20	.24*	.18	.18	.25*
Fairness	.36**	.36***	.38***	.37***	.38***
Leadership	.11	.10	.13	.08	.10
Forgiveness	-.06	-.05	.00	-.08	-.04
Modesty	.06	.07	.08	.07	.09
Prudence	-.03	-.07	-.05	-.10	-.13
Self-regulation	.19	.18	.19	.10	.11
Beauty	.25*	.27*	.26*	.24*	.27*
Gratitude	.24*	.24*	.24*	.20	.20

Hope	.46***	.47***	.46***	.27*	.29**
Humor	.03	.05	.02	.01	.01
Religiousness	.43***	.45***	.43***	.41***	.43***

Note. $N = 87$ couples. Partial 1 = correlations controlled for duration of relationship. Partial 2 = correlations controlled for males' and females' age. Partial 3 = correlations controlled for males' and females' life satisfaction. Partial 4 = correlations controlled for duration of relationship, males' and females' age, and males' and females' life satisfaction.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3

Predicting Males' and Females' Satisfaction: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses of 24 Character Strengths (i.e., Self-Reported and Partners' Self-Reported), and Couples' Similarity (i.e., Absolute Differences) in 24 Character Strengths

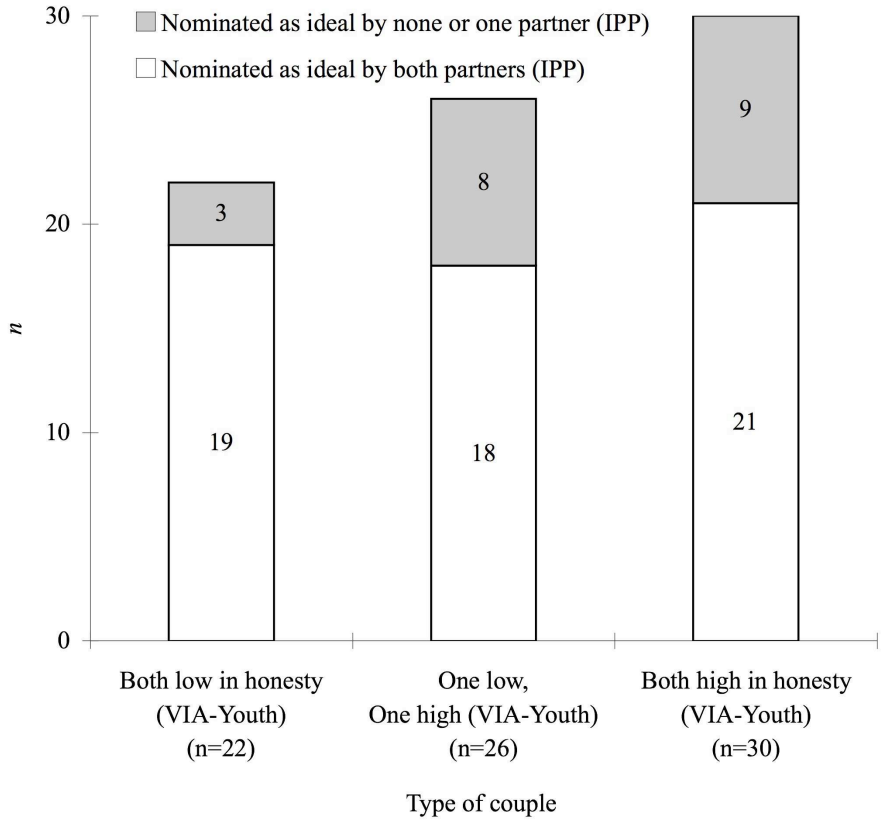
	Males' life satisfaction				Females' life satisfaction			
	R^2 Change				R^2 Change			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
Variables	Males' self-rating	Females' self-rating	Absolute difference	Final R	Females' self-rating	Males' self-rating	Absolute difference	Final R
Creativity	.013	.015	.003	.18	.016	.013	.003	.18
Curiosity	.012	.000	.009	.15	.042	.005	.017	.25
Open-mindedness	.009	.007	.002	.13	.002	.008	.002	.11
Love of learning	.002	.019	.000	.15	.045*	.025	.009	.28
Perspective	.004	.002	.010	.13	.028	.038	.002	.26
Bravery	.005	.008	.004	.13	.025	.013	.008	.21
Perseverance	.059*	.029	.042*	.36	.053*	.047*	.021	.35

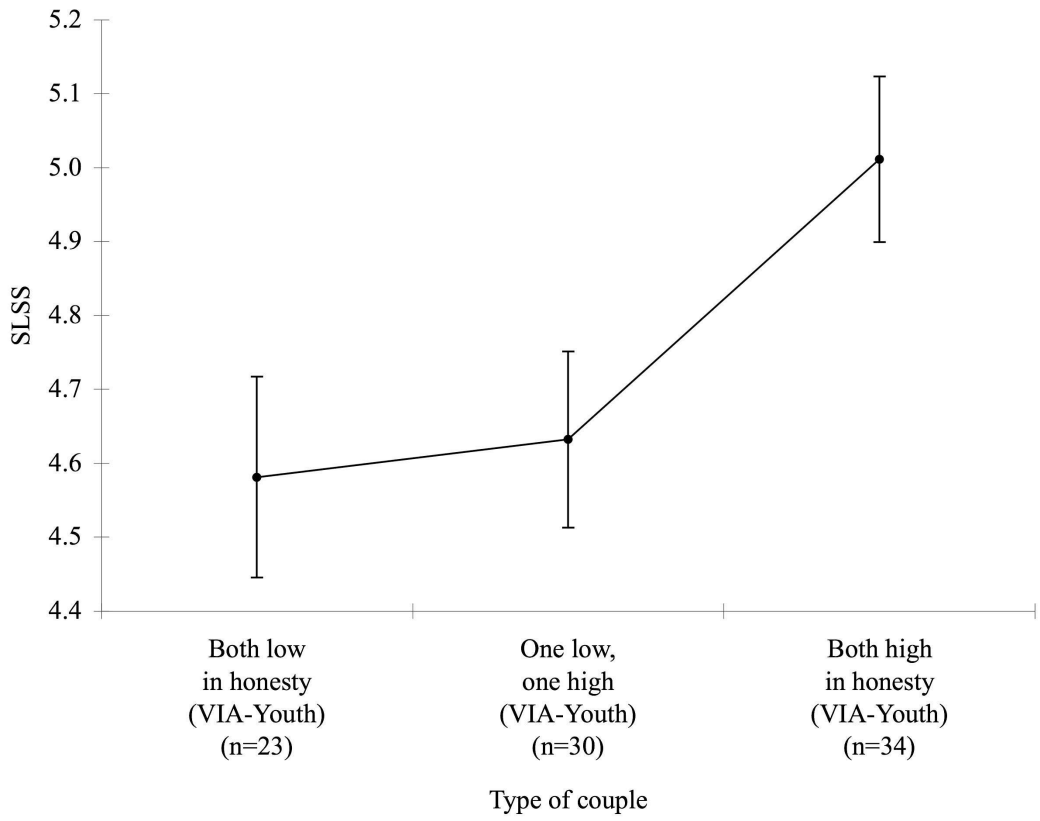
Honesty	.096**	.017	.017	.36	.060*	.008	.080**	.39
Zest	.264***	.014	.053*	.58	.253***	.014	.021	.54
Love	.240***	.000	.010	.50	.177***	.009	.033	.47
Kindness	.035	.002	.006	.21	.003	.000	.014	.13
Social Intelligence	.045*	.000	.025	.27	.022	.047*	.006	.27
Teamwork	.000	.022	.002	.16	.044	.006	.072*	.35
Fairness	.008	.004	.006	.14	.003	.001	.000	.07
Leadership	.005	.007	.006	.13	.035	.028	.016	.28
Forgiveness	.002	.063*	.043*	.33	.030	.008	.000	.20
Modesty	.010	.011	.011	.18	.014	.000	.003	.13
Prudence	.089**	.018	.029	.37	.051*	.044*	.005	.32
Self-regulation	.059*	.033	.006	.31	.076**	.037	.029	.38
Beauty	.027	.002	.002	.18	.000	.026	.006	.18
Gratitude	.258***	.016	.000	.52	.360***	.002	.006	.61
Hope	.404***	.005	.022	.66	.430***	.000	.001	.66
Humor	.104**	.003	.051*	.40	.055*	.009	.014	.28

Religiousness	.029	.004	.005	.19	.032	.034	.024	.30

Note. $N = 87$.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.


30
20
10
0
n
Nominated as ideal by none or one partner (IPP)
Nominated as ideal by both partners (IPP)
3
19
8
18
9
21
Both low in honesty (VIA-Youth) (n=22)
One low, One high (VIA-Youth) (n=26)
Both high in honesty (VIA-Youth) (n=30)
Type of couple


5.2
5.1
5.0
4.9
4.8
4.7
4.6
4.5
4.4
SLSS
Both low in honesty (VIA-Youth) (n=23)
One low, one high (VIA-Youth) (n=30)
Both high in honesty (VIA-Youth) (n=34)
Type of couple